

AMaGA Victoria

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

May 2026

Established in 1993, AMaGA Victoria is the peak body for Victoria's museums and galleries sector. We represent a diverse membership spanning major metropolitan museums, regional galleries, heritage sites, Indigenous cultural centres, and community-run collecting organisations. Our purpose in this submission is to ensure that museums, galleries and collecting organisations, and the workers and volunteers who sustain them, are fully recognised within Australia's cultural framework.

Revive made significant strides in recognising arts, culture and heritage as essential to Australian life. AMaGA Victoria strongly supports its ambitions and welcomes the continuation of its five pillars. In particular, we welcome Revive's recognition that cultural infrastructure includes museums, galleries, libraries, archives and digital collections, and that arts and culture are both generative and preservative, creating new works while also protecting heritage and cultural memory.

Our submission focuses on an important next step for the policy: ensuring that the broad cultural vision articulated in Revive is matched by equally broad workforce, investment and implementation settings. AMaGA Victoria has also endorsed the National Standards Taskforce's submission for the next National Cultural Policy.

Priority Recommendations

- Fund **First Nations skills and workforce development**, and deliver the second iteration of the **First Peoples Roadmap** through AMaGA.
- Support **community collecting organisations** as custodians of Australia's diverse local stories, and establish a coordinated **intergovernmental investment framework** to sustain them.
- Extend **workforce development investment** to museum and gallery workers (paid and volunteer) with the same specificity applied to artists and performing arts practitioners, and give effect to **Revive's psychosocial safety commitment** through sector-appropriate reporting pathways.
- Recognise the **community heritage sector** as foundational national cultural infrastructure and invest in its long-term sustainability.
- Fund the next edition of **Significance**, the national standard for collections assessment.
- Support the development of a **national sector census** to be delivered by AMaGA.

PILLAR 1: FIRST NATIONS FIRST

First Nations Skills & Workforce Development

Revive commits to a First Nations Creative Workforce Development Strategy, but its scope remains undefined, and the broader First Nations investment settings within this pillar are weighted toward artistic production and large-scale cultural infrastructure investment rather than collections practice and community heritage workforce development. It does not reach the collections-facing workforce in museums and galleries, nor First Nations communities already managing their own cultural material or working towards the development of cultural centres. Both needs remain unaddressed.

First Nations community members bring knowledge, relationships and cultural authority that formal training cannot substitute. Their participation in collections identification, documentation, repatriation and care produces better outcomes for collections, communities and the sector. AMaGA Victoria is currently piloting a partnership project with Museums Victoria's First Peoples team, training First Nations community members in collections management, documentation and access at community level. Programs co-developed and delivered like this are a model the National Cultural Policy could invest in and nationally scale via First Peoples-led organisations and peak body partnerships.

First Peoples Roadmap 2.0

AMaGA's **First Peoples Roadmap** (2018) established a 10-year framework for First Nations engagement and employment across Australia's museums and galleries. The first iteration has guided meaningful progress. With the framework reaching the end of its ten-year life in 2028, a second iteration is now needed to reflect where the sector actually is, not where it was in 2018. Language and protocols have evolved, expectations around digital stewardship and digitisation have grown substantially, and the repatriation landscape has advanced considerably since the Roadmap was written.

The second iteration must also better support the full diversity of collecting organisations, including volunteer-run organisations holding First Nations material without adequate guidance or capability support. It should be accompanied by practical training and implementation resources that translate policy commitments into sector practice. AMaGA Victoria is currently developing online modules that demonstrate what this looks like at state level; national investment through AMaGA would enable this model to scale.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Fund paid pathways for First Nations people into collections-facing roles, including training, mentorship and community-embedded placements at regional and community scale.
- Fund professional development for First Nations communities managing existing cultural centres and building capability toward new ones, including collections management and digital skills.
- Fund the second iteration of the First Peoples Roadmap through AMaGA.

PILLAR 2: A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

Australia's community heritage organisations (e.g. historical societies, local museums, RSLs, community archives, churches) hold thousands of local stories that exist nowhere else: migration histories, industrial heritage, community memory, stories of place and belonging. These are the stories Pillar 2 calls for. They are largely sustained by volunteers, often without formal funding, and they are at risk. While Revive acknowledges this sector, noting that historical societies are serviced by ageing volunteers working to bring collections to life, it provides no targeted funding mechanism to sustain them. The stories they hold cannot be recovered once lost, and neither can the community connections, volunteer commitment and local identity that these organisations sustain.

Intergovernmental Investment Framework

Sustaining this sector requires coordinated action across all three levels of government. The Commonwealth sets policy and provides baseline investment. State governments

support regional cultural programs and institutions. Local government often host many of these organisations (in council buildings, on council land, with operational support) but rarely provides dedicated collections expertise or funding. These three levels do not act in coordination. The next National Cultural Policy should establish the conditions for them to do so.

The **Community Heritage Grants (CHG)** program has supported over 1,750 projects since 1994 and is the closest thing Australia has to a dedicated federal mechanism for this sector. According to the National Library of Australia, the 2025 round distributed \$421,759 across 50 projects nationally. This represents a 50% success rate and an average grant of \$8,435. The CHG program is well-designed but limited in scope, excluding many of the operational and programming activities most relevant to community heritage organisations, and chronically oversubscribed and underfunded relative to national need.

Two international models point toward what a more ambitious architecture could look like. Canada's **Museums Assistance Program** structures federal heritage investment into dedicated functional streams for Indigenous heritage, collections management and exhibition access to ensure that each area of sector need has a distinct funding pathway rather than competing within a single undifferentiated pool. The UK's National Lottery Heritage Fund's **Heritage Places** program demonstrates the value of long-term, place-based federal commitment: through developing a 10-year strategy, it invests in a long-term view for local partnerships and institutional capacity that short-cycle project grants cannot. An expanded CHG infrastructure would provide the coordinated architecture currently absent from Australian cultural policy: building on long-term investment that is capitalised federally, structured to draw in state and local government, and organised into needs-based streams.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Substantially expand the Community Heritage Grants program to meet the scale of national need.
- Establish a coordinated intergovernmental investment framework for community heritage, with Commonwealth leadership through an expanded CHG program and structured co-investment from state and local government.

PILLAR 3: CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

Extending Workforce Recognition from Policy to Practice

Revive acknowledges the broad spectrum of arts workers, naming actors, curators, sculptors, lighting technicians and costume designers among them. However, its workforce and investment settings remain oriented towards artists and arts-based cultural institutions operating within recognised artforms and established modes of practice. Pillar 3's training and career development initiatives reflect this, with funding allocated to national performing arts training organisations and no equivalent investment in the museum and gallery workforce. The one case study featuring museum and gallery practice – the Aboriginal Arts Worker Training Program – appears as a First Nations-specific initiative. While a celebrated program, it is not a general commitment to the museum and gallery workforce. This is not a gap in recognition. It is a gap in action. The next National Cultural Policy must extend the same specificity of investment to those who care for, document and make accessible the collections that constitute Australia's cultural memory.

Psychosocial Safety: Beyond Resources

The cultural sector cannot thrive on a **workforce in distress**. AMaGA Victoria's research into psychosocial safety across Victoria's GLAM sector found that **94% of respondents experienced psychosocial hazards**, more than **80% said psychosocial stress affected their productivity** or led to time away from work, and **67% had considered leaving the sector**. While **51.6% said psychosocial resources existed** in their workplace, only **3.9% described those supports as excellent**. In addition, **44% did not report incidents for fear of retaliation** or reputational consequences, and **32.5% did not believe reporting would lead to change**. As one respondent put it: "The industry is small and tight. I voiced concerns in one [organisation] and it followed me to the next job interview. Lesson to me was never speak up." We expect the recent Creative Workplaces survey results, currently awaiting publication, to support our findings.

Revive commits to making workplace safety, including psychosocial safety, a condition of arts funding. That commitment is necessary but insufficient for a sector where, as this data shows, workers already know what the standards require and still don't report, because the barrier is not awareness but fear of retaliation. Giving effect to Revive's commitment in the museum and gallery context requires external reporting pathways that sit outside both individual organisations and formal legal mechanisms, and that workers can access without fear of reputational consequence in a small and tightly networked sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Extend workforce development, professional support and training investment to museum and gallery workers (paid and volunteer) with the same specificity applied to artists and performing arts practitioners
- Give effect to Revive's commitment to make workplace safety, including psychosocial safety, a condition of arts funding by establishing sector-appropriate implementation, recognising that compliance against minimum standards is insufficient where workers cannot safely report non-compliance.
- Establish external reporting pathways for psychosocial concerns that sit outside individual organisations and existing legal mechanisms, addressing the sector's structural barriers to reporting.

PILLAR 4: STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Community Heritage Sector as National Cultural Infrastructure

In Victoria alone, more than 1,000 community organisations – museums, historical societies, RSLs, sporting clubs, churches, hospitals and schools – hold a conservative estimate of 10 million items. **Approximately two-thirds of all collecting organisations are volunteer-run**. Many hold First Nations material, significant local history, and stories absent from state and national institutions. Yet the people responsible for these collections frequently lack the training to identify what they hold, understand the cultural protocols that apply, or engage appropriately with the communities to which those collections belong. This reflects a longstanding structural failure to invest in workforce capability and support.

The sector faces mounting and compounding pressures: funding insecurity, ageing volunteer bases, infrastructure challenges, and the growing demands of digital stewardship. Expectations around digital technologies and access are placing new requirements on

organisations that frequently lack the capacity to respond. For community heritage organisations, the digital capability gap is a real and present challenge. The next National Cultural Policy should invest in professional development and training pathways for paid and volunteer workers, including collections care, First Nations protocols and repatriation obligations, documentation and access, disaster preparedness and recovery, digital literacy training, and succession planning.

Significance 3.0

Significance 2.0 (2009) is the national standard for collections assessment, referenced in Revive without funding to support delivery or updating. More than fifteen years on, the framework needs renewal. Contemporary practice requires that significance assessment integrate First Nations cultural protocols, community-centred approaches, digital stewardship and repatriation obligations. The next edition should give collecting organisations of every scale a framework fit for current stewardship responsibilities. This would be a modest investment with reach across every jurisdiction, and valuable for community heritage organisations currently working without adequate guidance.

National Sector Census

A national sector census would for the first time establish a comprehensive register of Australia's collecting organisations, capturing data across collections, workforce, public engagement, economic impact, infrastructure, and other indicators. AMaGA Victoria is currently rolling out a quadrennial census for the Victorian sector, providing a model through which a nationally coordinated census could be delivered via AMaGA. Without this baseline, the national sector remains essentially unmeasured in a coordinated way, and policy responses are made without evidence to guide investment. The gap is most acute in the community heritage sector, where the level of need is highest and data is most scarce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recognise the community heritage sector as foundational national cultural infrastructure and invest in its sustainability through targeted support for collections care, digital literacy, regional service delivery and disaster preparedness.
- Fund the next edition of Significance, updating the national standard for collections assessment to reflect First Nations cultural protocols and digital stewardship.
- Support the development of a national sector census to be delivered by AMaGA, drawing on the AMaGA Victoria framework.

CONCLUSION

Australia's cultural story is held not only on stages and screens, but in the millions of objects, records and community histories Australians have chosen to preserve. The institutions, workers, volunteers and First Nations communities who sustain this cultural memory are not peripheral to Australia's cultural life – they are central to it. They deserve a policy that not only recognises them, but funds them accordingly.

The recommendations in this submission are practical and deliverable. Much of what we have called for either builds on frameworks Revive itself established or is grounded in proven models. None of the recommendations require the next National Cultural Policy to start from scratch – only to follow through with sustained investment. Without this, Australia risks losing not only irreplaceable collections, but the community memory and cultural participation built around them.